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ABSTRACT

Noting that words like "alienation," "ideology," and "hegemony" are cropping up in academic journals (particularly those journals that concern themselves with rhetoric) with more and more frequency, this paper explains some of the basic terms used by the political left. The paper notes that such terms tend to come up even in everyday speech, but the meanings in everyday speech are at some remove from their specialized web of meanings. The second part of the paper discusses how Paulo Freire uses several of the terms. Terms defined in the paper include: alienation, "conscientizacao," dialectic, existentialism, hegemony, idealism, ideology, materialism, metaphysics, praxis, problematic, reification, structuralism, thesis, antithesis, synthesis, and war of positions. As far as classroom application of these terms, the paper suggests that when teachers claim they are going to show students how to think, it can too easily mean what to think. The paper points out that Freire would have teachers show students that they can think. A glossary of the terms is attached. (RS)

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Victor Villanueva, Jr.

[Paper presented as distinguished lecturer for the Annual Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, Pittsburgh, PA, 19 November 1993]

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Demystifying the Jargon: The Language of the Left

I begin with some caveats.

First caveat: Classical and orthodox marxism tends to break its theories into two concerns, one social and philosophical--the superstructure; the other, economic--the base. I think the distinction is more a theoretical convenience than an accurate reflection of social systems. Besides, I'm not all that well-versed in political economy. So the base will get short shrift in what follows.

Second caveat: There is now a line of thinking that is being identified as "post-marxist." I won't be touching that either. For one thing, if the subject of this lecture assumes an audience not all that comfortable with the standard stuff. For another, I'm still trying to break through the post-marxist code myself.

Third caveat: The nature of this lecture kind of puts me in the position of a talking dictionary; so, please, feel free to interrupt for clarification or just to slow me down.

With all that said, let me begin with a line from a recent journal in our business--two sentences; just two--which you might intuit having something to say, but you know is not saying that something to you:

> The theorist could argue that radical intentions are blunted when deprived a complex dialectical framework with which to think beyond the impasses of bourgeois ideology that we all

CS 214 119

> inherit; in the absence of such a radical framework the radical teacher is likely to reinvent ideas tied to the very hegemony he or she wants to smash. The pedagogue might reply that a Marxism that fails to historicize itself in the context of concrete praxis becomes an ineffectual theoreticism.

The words are Carl Freedman's, found in a 1987 College English article titled "Marxist Theory, Radical Pedagogy, and the Reification of Thought." And so the problem begins, right at the title. I'll get to "reification" later. But what he says, I believe, is that theorists worry that teachers who want to change things might not be changing things at all if they don't understand how things got to be the way they are in the first place. And teachers ask what good theory if theory never gets translated to the classroom? Pretty commonsensical, isn't it?

So why didn't he say it that way, you ask. And one of you turns to the other and says, "he wants to impress his colleagues." And maybe there's something to that. But I don't think that's all there is. Let me do it this way: when you say "revise," you know that you mean something different from "edit." But do you always make the distinctions explicit when speaking with someone, even when speaking with students? If your answer is "no," which I'm assuming it is, it is because a bit of jargon, of specialized language, has become part of your everyday discourse, so much so that the complex web of meanings contained in the word is kind of taken for granted. That's how ideology

works, but more of that later too. For now, what happens when you say "revise," or "recursion," or even "portfolio" is what happens with lefty writers (and deconstructionists and feminist theorists and some of the other ists that you would read if only you could read them). Mr. Freedman assumes that his readers know what a dialectic is, or ideology, or the bourgeoisie, or hegemony. But only a few do, at least here, in America, where anti-communist sentiment got Soviet Socialism and an important social theory confused. Yet all those ists keep showing up in journals.

Even those who would have nothing to do with left politics assume an understanding of the basic terms. For example, if you're familiar with the work of Anne Ruggles Gere, say, you'd recognize her as one having a lot to say about writing groups, not one associated with leftist politics, no series of articles on radical pedagogy, no long citations from Henry Giroux or from Paulo Freire. Yet her book on Writing Groups takes the space to explain how Marx's thinking provides a theoretical justification for collaborative work, insofar as it lessens feeling of alienation, alienation in the social sense described by Marx. And there's Vygotsky, a name invoked by just about everybody these days. Marxist. So much a marxist that Stalin saw fit to censor Vygotsky's works. Vygotsky died of TB we're told, but his TB occurred during the midst of Stalin's Great Purge. Who knows.

So you're among those who realize that the fall of Soviet Socialism doesn't mean the proof that marxism is unworkable,

among those who realize that there's a system of ideas that might still have social value. And you see words like alienation and ideology and hegemony cropping up in journals with more and more frequency. And it seems like everyone is at least familiar with Paulo Freire, and you're told that he's marxist. So you pick up a journal article--only to find that if the folks writing the journal articles have something to say, they aren't saying it to you. And sometimes you can't even get through the title.

So here's what we're going to do. First, I'll try to explain some basic terms, the kind of terms that tend to come up even in everyday speech, but terms whose meaning in everyday speech are at some remove from their specialized web of meanings. For instance, I teach rhetoric. It's a complex subject, huge. It's hardly huge in its connotations when used by a politician, say, or a news commentator (except to suggest a huge pile of BS). So, first the words that you've likely heard before, but with my trying to put them back into their specialized context. Then, I'll offer some terms from Paulo Freire. He makes some of the same kinds of assumptions as Carl Freedman, the guy I quoted when I began this. I'll leave the practical applications to Ira Shor, here at the conference for just that purpose, Shor, the master at bringing Freire to the American classroom. But what is the theory that he has put into practice?

I begin big. Two major philosophical camps, historically: idealism and materialism. Idealism operates on a kind of faith,

believes that the answers to metaphysical questions (metaphysical questions being those that ask how nature and reality come to be and how they change), are spiritual, nonmaterial. The word for studying this spiritual cause of change is teleology. Hegel believed in the spiritual. Materialism looks to physical causes. The earliest philosopher normally seen as a materialist is Democritus, who lived in 5th and 4th centuries BC. He created atomic theory. A slightly older contemporary was the sophist rhetorician Protagoras, who said that "man is the measure of all things"--there is no natural, gods-given social order. And there was Socrates during the same time, who believed that religion is not the same as morality, and in a way very much like Freire, or anyone advocating critical consciousness, for that matter, said that doubt is the way to truth. Smacked of atheism. He got to swallow hemlock for his ideas.

And it is true that there is an atheistic strain to the materialists. Marx's father was Jewish, but he converted to Lutheranism, raised little Charlie as a Christian, with the adult Karl becoming atheist. And classical marxism does go on about religion. But we know that one of the major themes of the Sophists, materialists, was love of the gods. And we know of the Maryknoll sisters and priests and the Jesuits in Latin America, espousing marxism without denying their Catholicism. I tried being agnostic years back, long before I knew of Marx or marxism. I felt guilty. I couldn't deny my Catholicism. Still can't. Even Pope John Paul II, hardly a radical, "does not attack

Marxism or liberal secularism because they are the wave of the future," says someone close to the Pope, the theologian Rocco Buttiglione (qtd. in Harvey 41, emphasis added). And surely a reason Paulo Freire has been so widely accepted despite his marxism is because of his Christian humanism. To study and even to accept much of materialism does not mean having to recant.

But there is another problem with the pre-marxian idea of metaphysics. The traditional notion of materialism is mechanistic. It's eternal, unchanging, in a sense, in that the mechanisms set in motion in the beginning, that first beginning, the big bang, say, are the same mechanisms in operation today, in motion but never changing, not really. Take on this position for social or human behavior and you've got ideology--the way of the world, unchanging. The idealists had a concept that was more dynamic than mechanistic materialism: the dialectic.

Actually, the dialectic is introduced, for us at least, by Aristotle, who is no idealist, having rejected the idea of a separate perfect reality professed by his teacher, Plato. Aristotle was a pragmatist, in some sense anticipating Marx in seeing social conflicts in terms of who has the power. But in terms of dialectic, for Aristotle the dialectic was a logic system, a process of critical reasoning used to discover or to refute in order to arrive at truth. For Plato, the dialectic was the question and answer system we call the Socratic method.

In the 18th century, the dialectic gets another use through Immanuel Kant. Kant says that we can't prove reality, because

for every thesis the mind produces, the mind can produce an equally valid antithesis. To prove his point--(yep, to prove that nothing is provable)--he set up four contradictions of pure reason as four sets of theses and antitheses. Comes Ficht and then Schelling and they create the synthesis, the solution to the contradictions that neither accepts nor rejects the thesis or the antithesis. Hegel comes along, about a generation after Kant, to posit a dialectic which is a threefold process in which reason is revealed through reality, and reality is reason and spirit. Marx says, "good idea, but forget spirit." Marx creates dialectical materialism, in which the conflicting reality isn't mind and spirit; it's physical reality and society: capitol and labor.

Dialectic, in the language of the left, is the struggles and the contradictory interests between capitol and labor. And the classes that represent them are the bourgeoisie and the proletariate. The bourgeoisie own the money, the tools, the workplaces for a product; they are the owners of the means of production. Most of the rich folks we might know (at least in passing?) are not the bourgeoisie; most, even CEOs, work for someone, work for that 2% we learned about long ago. And the proletariat are those who must earn wages in order to survive. Collar colors, blue or white, make no difference, as long as there is a chain to that collar, that paycheck. We are all the proletariat.

And as the proletariate we are subject to exploitation. And exploited, we become alienated. We are exploited because we

don't earn what we are worth. If we did, the capitalists couldn't realize a profit. So we work for someone else, with relatively little control over when and how we'll work, or where or for whom, little control, even, of what we'll do. Know something of administratively imposed curricula, of the higher administration using "higher" as their excuse, who in turn say "the school board" or "regents"? And you feel almost like a robot at times? Alienation. The solution, according to Marx, is to form unions: "Workers of the world unite;" form a union.

In America, at least, there grew the great alliance of capital and labor by way of the unions. In other words, unions took on a mediating role between capital and labor, serving themselves and the interests of capital in the name of the workers. Unions become another decision maker for labor. Alienation remains.

But alienation--an estrangement of the individual from the self, the natural environment, social life--sounds awful. Sounds like what we all endure and sometimes try to do something about: counseling, backpacking, a national professional conference. Why do we endure it at all? The answer: ideology and hegemony.

Marx never conceived of hegemony, or at least he never wrote about it. The word came up with Lenin, but he didn't do much with it. It was Antonio Gramsci who developed the concept. And in developing the concept, Gramsci addressed the overwhelmingly large problem in Marx's rendering of ideology--the idea that we don't know that we're being messed with, that we are under the

influence of a false consciousness. But who doesn't go backpacking with a sense that there is a need to get back in touch with nature? And if that's the sense, then we know we've been alienated from nature. And who doesn't know that every hour's work means greater profit for those we work for? We know.

But I get ahead of myself. I've mentioned the problem with the common marxian definition of ideology, but I haven't defined it. The most facile definition is "world view": our individual conceptions of the self, the relation of the self to the collectivity (which could be as small as the family, as large as humanity), the self to the physical environment, the way of conceiving society, its nature, and the way of thinking about history. When ideology is decidedly political (as the word tends to be used), then it contains the program for political action. And what distinguishes "ideology" from culture, I believe, is that ideology is systematic, a set of principles, even if consciously unrecognized and thereby unquestioned; whereas culture can contain random, disassociated beliefs. For Marx and most marxisms, the set of principles are imposed. We haven't a clue.

So how do these false notions get passed on? My answer would be "rhetorically," through the conscious use of language aimed at persuading others to accept particular world views. But the Party line, so to speak, would be that ideology is passed on through a process of reproduction (which Louis Althusser will modify and call "interpellation"). Now here I'll rather

irreverently slosh together concepts from Marx, Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and--especially--the Hungarian best known in this country as a literary critic, Gyorgy Lukacs. Essentially, ideology is passed on through the institutions of civil society, civil society being the complement of the State. Those institutions would be things like the family, the church, the media--and the schools. Pretty obvious.

And so we step into the system that precedes us, and it seems normal, the way of the world, so much the way of the world that we become subject to reification, reification being the contemplation of the way of the world--maybe even its study, but not its questioning, not looking at the big picture, not seeing the totality (another bit of jargon, but not a tricky word).

summary

Can you see the pivotal role education has? It is an institution of civil society that tends to prefer idealism over materialism, promoting particular ideologies--in America, liberalism and laissez-faire capitalism, which boils down to "every man for himself and let the best man win (Decidedly man. And dare I say it? Decidedly white man.) Surely these are isolating, alienating ideologies, even the privilege we confer on the white man an isolation, something he'd like to escape, I'd bet. And in this alienating ideology the schools promote critical thinking (problem solving, the problems already preexisting) rather than critical consciousness (problem posing,

trying to get at the potential problems within or underlying the preexisting). And so I begin to spill over into Freire.

Paulo Freire is kind of a stew of modern trends in marxism. There's a dash of Lukacs, a couple of cups of Althusser, some chunks of Sartre's and Lefebvre's existentialism (which smells a lot like liberalism), and a healthy portion of Gramsci. At the heart of Freire is conscientizacao (the ao in the Potuguese pronounced almost like a nasal n, Sow Paulo sounds like a pig: it's Sao[n] Paulo). Conscientizacao has been translated to "critical consciousness." Critical consciousness is being able to see the dialectical relation between the self and society, the causes of alienation, the recognition that society contains social, political, and economic conditions which are at odds with the individual will to freedom.

The "will to freedom" is an existentialist notion. When that recognition is given voice, and a decision is made to do something about the contradiction between the individual and the society's workings against individual freedom, even if the action is no more than giving voice, there is praxis. The way to arrive at critical consciousness for Freire is through generative themes. Generative themes are critical assessments of limit-situations, the myths that keep us from the totality.

And how this gets played out is with Freire having students look at their individual histories and cultures and compare those histories and ways of being with what they are led to believe is

their places in the world, making the contradictions between their world views and the official world views explicit.

The umbrella phrase for this process is the often cited, rarely explained term problematizing the existential situation. The "existential situation" draws on Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy that has us seeking to give our lives meaning by means of achieving individual freedom. "Problematizing" comes from Althusser's structuralist marxism. Structuralism says that there are social, political, and economic systems in place that keep us from changing the way things are, that essentially keep us from fully exercising our freedom, systems we see as "natural." The way out of these systems is through the problematic, which means a questioning of the things we don't normally question, questioning just how natural the "natural" is. Freire would have his students look to themselves, their own experiences, in order to question, and in questioning no longer accepting the "way of the world," beginning to articulate, to give voice to the things needed for change. And this rhetorical enterprise--giving voice to repressive conditions, speaking for the improvement of society--comes from a notion of Antonio Gramsci terms the "war of position." More in a minute.

So Freire's process begins with private, lived experience (which does not have to be autobiography). These experiences are generalized. In generalizing personal events, students find that nothing is value-free, that all is in one way or another political, is always affected by and affecting their conduct as

citizens of the various communities they travel within and through. Students discover that they are constantly in dialectical relationships with, in conflict with, alienated from, their environments and that these environments are affected by social, political, and economic circumstances and events. Personal lives must contend with social, political, and economic situations. For Freire, the more students are aware of the dialectic, the more they can affect changes in their selves and in their environments. In short the more the dialectic is recognized as such the greater the chance for lessening alienation. In Freire's words:

> They are not "beings outside of"; they are "beings for another." Therefore the solution to their problem is not to become "beings inside of," but men freeing themselves; for, in reality, they are not marginal to the structure, but oppressed men within it. Alienated men, they cannot overcome their dependency by "incorporation" into the very structure responsible for their dependency. There is no other road to humanization--theirs as well as everyone else's--but authentic transformation of the dehumanizing structure.

These words can be found in his Cultural Action for Freedom (page 11). The "alienated man" he refers to there, in the passage I've just quoted, comes from Henri Lefebvre, an existentialist marxist. The alienated man is one who is kept from seeing the whole picture, and in being kept from the whole, the totality, is

kept from attaining his humanity, a realization of freedom. Nor is he peeping in from the sidelines, trying to find his place. The metaphor of the margin is neat for teachers of writing, a notebook metaphor where teachers too can often see themselves. But talk of margins can keep eyes focussed on a piece of paper, not on Freire's "dehumanizing structure," where the alienated are trying to look up from their places at the bottom. The dehumanizing structure mentioned by Freire involves class and something like a caste system, those whose histories tell of colonization or slavery. And it's in the telling that all the difference lies. That's why English Departments took to Freire early on: discourse is his medium.

And discourse was Gramsci's medium as well: a political activist for whom language was his tools in trade, a journalist, a student of the classics and of linguistics. For Gramsci, language is thought, something Vygotsky is saying about the same time, though in Russia rather than Italy. Gramsci's contribution to Western marxism, to socio-political theory in general, concerns <u>hegemony</u>, a concept which had him consider the roles of different kinds of intellectuals, the social and political dimensions of education, and the existence of mediate ideologies which make for historical blocs in which certain classes rule and other classes serve by a kind of consensus.

Oh, oh. Your brows are furrowing. Anf it's getting too late for me to be brief. Let me try it this way. Hegemony recognizes that various cultures, various collectivities, even

various individuals contain ideologies. The owners have ideologies; workers have ideologies. Owners are in many ways like workers--humans, with families, communities, beliefs. Some of their ideologies would necessarily be the same as ours; and some of the ideologies shared by capitalists and workers would work to the greater advantage of the capitalists. So those become the ideologies that get played up. That is, the dominant classes exploit commonalities between their ideologies and the ideologies of other classes. As a result, those in what Gramsci calls subaltern positions, those not among the workers, not even those workers who are dominant in many senses, see themselves as serving their own interests. And they are, to some extent. They also see that they are serving the interests of the dominant classes. But self-interest overrides. The middle-level manager in a large corporation or the "owner" of a local franchise might know she is employed, that she is working for another, but through money-market shares, stock options, and the like she is able to play the part of a boss, while supplementing the interests of her bosses. Subalterns, then, cooperate in their own exploitation. We are subject to coercion only insofar as the dominant classes exert their power over the institutions which serve as transmitters of moral and intellectual codes: religion, education, mass media. Hegemony otherwise operates through consent. So remove consent.

And the removal of consent is possible. We've done it here in America: when we didn't agree to a war with Latin America, for

example. It is just that we tend to be reactive, deciding against decisions made, never deciding on which decisions ought to be made. Since hegemony is a network woven with the threads of both the official and the popular, consisting of the ideologies of the dominated and the dominant, it is permeable. Contradictions slip through. We are given to what Gramsci calls a "contrary consciousness," given to accepting the ideologies which serve the dominant and equally given to the possibility of criticism. Hegemony contains the possibility for counterhegemony.

And the way to that counterhegemony is through the conscious use of language--the very thing we are supposed to be experts at. Gramsci calls this use of language the "war of position." For Gramsci, this means forming a new "historic bloc." A historic bloc is formed when a war of position has been so successful that changes are sought and brought into effect throughout the cultural, political, and economic sectors of society. A new consensus is formed--a new hegemony. Consent, the key to hegemony, had to have been gained through careful articulation and negotiation throughout the social system. New terms, or new definitions for existing terms, agreeable to all, had to have been developed. "Socialized medicine" becomes the "national health plan," for instance. The war of position underlies Freire's hope, that in changing the word we would change the world. A historic bloc, formed by a war of position, in order to bring about a new hegemony is, then, brought about by persuasive

practice. Hegemony is rhetorical. The life's blood to the heart of Freire, to conscientizacao, is the conscious use of language.

And conscientizacao, the war of positions, the counter to a hegemony that does not allow true equity, is systolic and diastolic; it works both ways. Problem posing, having students discover and articulate, means that we teachers can't impose our worldviews, that mustn't become classroom propagandists, but it also doesn't mean that students make all curricular decisions. We all know of Freire's "Banking Concept of Education," in which we invest students' minds with information and hope that they'll gather interest over time. But we seem not as familiar with his "Laissez-Fare" educator: Here's what he says:

> I cannot leave the students by themselves because I am trying to be a liberating educator. Laissez-faire! I cannot fall into laissez-faire. On the other hand, I cannot be authoritarian. I have to be radically democratic and responsible and directive. Not directive of the students, but directive of the process, the liberating teacher is not doing something to the students but with the students.

These were words spoken to Ira Shor. I leave specifics on how this might be done to Shor, then. At best I can say that when I hear teachers claim they're going to show students how to think that can too easily mean what to think. Freire would have us show students that they think.

Language of the Left: A Too Basic Glossary

(Where names appear in parentheses, there are many other schools of thought or interpretations of the term, but I have limited the definition to that espoused by the person within the parentheses.)

alienation. an estrangement of the individual from the self, the natural environment, or social life. For Marx, the workplace is a cause of alienation, in that we do not decide what to do or how; the things we produce at work are causes of alienation because we have no control over what they will be used for; and the vying for jobs in order to gather private property is a cause of alienation, in that we become dogs eating dogs, alienated from one another.

conscientizacao. critical consciousness, a questioning of ideologies.

dialectic. in logic and in rhetoric, the system of argumentation designed to arrive at truth by refutation. In eighteenth century **idealist philosophy**, the method for establishing how pure reason is unattainable (Kant), or else the system by which reason is revealed in the conflict between the rational and the spiritual (Hegel). **For Marx**, the natural process of life in society, particularly the contradictory interests between capitol and labor.

existentialism. a philosophical attitude marked by its concern for personal responsibility and human freedom and the importance of the human's need to make choices. For Sartre that freedom is the freedom to choose (though there is no freedom not to choose) and the freedom to negate the features of the world we find ourselves in, to negate our "limit situations" (Freire).

hegemony. the overarching system whereby certain ideologies are given emphasis over others in order to maintain present social and economic systems. Operates by way of consent (including--or maybe even especially--the consent of silence and resignation).

idealism. a philosophical way of thinking which considers reality the incarnation of a "universal idea" or "consciousness." Idealism is closely linked to religion, leading most often to ideas of God.

ideology. a systematic set of principles that make for a world view which includes beliefs about the nature of the self in relation to the collectivity, self to the natural environment, and the self to society, all within a particular view of history; **when political**, ideology is the set of principles which determine courses of action.

materialism. a philosophical way of thinking which considers matter primary and consciousness secondary. **Mechanistic materialism** looks to motion rather than change, all matter being as it was, making no allowance for spontaneous movements of bodies that could make for qualitative change. **Dialectical materialism** sees matter in conflict, the conflicts making for change. **Historical materialism** sees the development of material goods as necessary to human existence, as the primary force which determines social life, and as the force which conditions the transition from one social order to another.

metaphysics. the concern with nature and the structure of reality. Looks to first causes of reality.

praxis. putting theory into action.

problematic. the underlying method to Althusserian structuralism that questions underlying assumptions, ideologies, economic situations: "problem posing" (Freire).

reification. the opposite of praxis and problem-posing; the mere contemplation of existing personal, social, political situations.

structuralism. the system of ideas, social systems, and economic systems into which we are born and which act to form our consciousnesses within particular ideologies (Althusser).

thesis, antithesis, synthesis. as applied by Hegel, the stages in every process of development, each stage refuting the one previous, with the last reuniting within itself the dominant features of the first two.

war of positions. a rhetorical enterprise, in which the interests of oppressed groups are articulated in such a way as to have all groups realize that the interests of all are better served with a new set of social, political, and economic principles--the necessary precursor to a counterhegemony.